

Games in the Ahom Period: A Glimpse

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Abstract: *The advent of the ahoms in assam was an event of great significance for Indian history. The Ahoms who followed the traditional, socio-cultural and religious games for the entertainment of the common people. They played such games like haati juj, xen-kanuar juj, maal juj, kukura juj, dhup khel, kori khel, nao khel, asari khei, hoi gudu khel, ghila khel, tang guti etc. These were played at the Rupahi Pather of Rongpur. The common people could enjoy the games altogether. There are common beliefs associated with these khel also. In that period many games were popular and found significance. However some of these games were still played traditionally in some particular places of Assam. Purpose of the study: This paper aims to analyse such games which were commonly played during the Ahom period. However, it was destroyed in course of time due to natural causes, but at the same time these were also relevant .Because the games were related with natural rituals, common beliefs, physical activities. Methodology: The research methods mainly used in this study are analytical and descriptive methods. The necessary materials are collected from library and used, with proper observation and analysis, to justify the proposed ideas. Main Findings: Being a part of north-east India the Ahom, a distinct ethnic group inhabiting in Assam has practices so much games which is relevant today. Ahom families has belongs look after Cows, Buffalo, Elephant, Horses, Ducks, Hen, Fowls, Pigs which have also seen today. And they were use these animals to fight against each other which has call as animal fights, and enjoys as entertainment at the time of different religious festival. This research has been aims to establish harmony with themes in different tribes and community of the hills and plains. Moreover Applications of this study: This paper seems to be beneficial in comprehending the contribution in present society. It has impact in shaping and contribution that society which is going to be in impractical and artificial games. These games also contributes to hold a rich, patronage culture of a famous dynasty. Novelty/Originality of this study: At every step of our society, we see the relevance of ancient games in such a period. Of course some kind of new parts of games have been consisted with these games, so on. In this paper our aims is to critically analyze the present condition of our games in our society.*

Keywords: Socio-Cultural, Religious Games, Common Rupahi pather, Khel

1. Introduction

In every place and culture since the arrival of humankind on the face of earth games are being played in any form or the other. The genesis of it lies in the natural human instincts. For a child, finding enjoyment in moving its hand and foot, making sounds become game. In such a manner, many games circulating in the society transform into national games. Many such games were there in our society which in due course of time has been forgotten by people and even the names of such games also been erased from the human mind, eventually, are confined in some records of history. During the period of Ahom kingdom many such games attained the fame of national games(state games) similar to the Olympics in Greece. The prevalence of many games during the 600 years prestigious reign of the Ahoms can be discerned from numerous historical sources, e.g. records in Sachipat, chronicles etc.

Objectives

The main objectives of this paper are as follows-

- To introduce ancient major games played in Ahom's period.and to the new generation,
- To inspire the Research on these traditional games for the newer generation ,
- Focus to develop the mental, physical and natural activities of the society,
- This Research will help to enrich greater Assamese culture of traditional games and sports and to revive the precious and most valuable games.

2. Literature Review

Various articles and books are published in Assam Modern Assamese poetry. Some of the Assamese books that had been done before include – Barua, B.K (2003), “ A cultural History of assam” , Goswami, P.C (1985), “Kamrupa Buranjir Ahilapati”,**Axom Buranji**, Bhuyan, S.K.,(1932), *Deodhai Ahom Buranji*,Sarma, N, (2007) “ Asomar Khel Dhamali”, Sonowal, G. “ Traditional games and sports”, Bargohain, J.K,(2013) “Asamar Sanskritik Itihas (pratham khanda)”, Rajkumar, S, (2013) “ Itihase Soaura Chasahata Bachar” . These books and articles were studied for preparing this paper.

3. Methodology

Analytical and descriptive methods are mainly used in this paper. For discussion and analysis I have collected both primary and secondary data. For primary data collection I used some books of Ahom history. Secondary data are collected from articles and books

4. Discussion / Analysis

According to the records, the first instance of games such as – haati juj(elephant fight), xen-kanuar juj (hawk releasing), maal juj (wrestling), kukura juj (cock fight) etc. started only after coming to the throne of Sukrangpha or Rudra Singha, the elder son of Joymoti and Gadadhar Singha or Supatpha, in the year 1696. These games were played at the Rupahi Pathar (field), so that people from every strata – kings, courtiers and the common people could enjoy the games altogether and this initiative was taken by Swargadeo Rudra

Singha. Two-storey Rang Ghar with bamboo and wood was built in the middle of the field. In 1746, Pramatta Singha or Susenpha, son of Rudra Singha had built it concrete. According to historians during the reign of Rajeswar Singha another Rang Ghar (dutupiya-Two gabled may be) was erected beside the main Rang Ghar. However, it was destroyed in course of time due to natural causes. Historians and archaeologists consider that Rang Ghar is the first pavilion or amphitheatre in Asia and Rupahi Pathar of Rangpur is the first stadium. Games played under the patronage of Ahom kings turned into national games in this field. For the entertainment of the common people and themselves, the Ahom kings had organized various festivals (Neog, H/Gogoi, L, "Asomiya Sanskriti") The information of the sport events were announced with drum beats prior to the day of sport, and on the particular day, people from both royal and common background gathered at the Rupahi field to enjoy the games.

The animals were kept at the Rupahi field to systematically organise the animal sports and to address the demand for animals required. A post called Baruah was created to take care the animals. For example, to look after the hawks- Xensua Baruah, for horses- Ghorasua Baruah, for elephants – Haatisua Baruah, and for hens – Kukurasua Baruah etc. The internal administrative system of Ahoms were very strict, developed and much ahead of time which has present day relevance also.()

Doul-devaloy or the temples of the period are engraved with pictures of animals fighting and other games. The pictorial literature "Ghora Nidan" and "Hasti Vidyarnava" in the times of Swargadeo Shiva Singha or Sutangpha have descriptions how to treat and take care horses and elephants respectively. From these two books it can be assumed that these animals were treated very carefully in the Ahom period. Detailed descriptions of many kinds of games under the patronage of the royal household can be found in books such as – Deodhai Axom Buranji (1932), Tungkhungia Buranji (1932), Satsari Ahom Buranji (1930), Tai Sanskritir Ruprekha etc. Important games organized were – Falcon fight, elephant fight, buffalo fight, tiger-bear fight, boar, crocodile, rhinoceros, lion, mithun fight etc. Besides, horse riding, cock fight, egg tapping etc. were also held under the patronage of the kings, found mention in some books. Among the common people some games were popular and organized other than patronized games. Those were – human and animal fight, stilt race, race carrying someone at the back, dhup khel, kori khel, boat racing, hat khel, gas kumti khel, asari khel, roja khel, hoi gudu khel, ghila khel, lukaluki (hide&seek), tang guti, topa khel, tekeli bhonga, sariya khel, kumura khel, doul khel, guti lukua khel etc. In this essay descriptions of some of these games are given.

Xenjuj or Hawk Fight:

According to the Axom Buranji by Kashinath Tamuli Phukan it is recorded that during the reign of Rudra Singha hawk fighting was a major game. According to the description – "that Sandikoi Borphukan had invented the games of boat and hawk to amuse the king." (Gohainboruah, P., (2018), Asomar Buranji). For the hawk fight the hawks to be made ready and for that Xensua Baruah was employed who had to domesticate and train the birds. These trained

domesticated birds capture and bring down 'konua' bird to the Xensua and it is known as hawk releasing.

Mohjuj or Buffalo Fight:

Buffalo fight is one of the major games during the Ahom period. The fights were held in Rupahi field. At Rang Ghar two buffalo's fighting and two keepers of buffalo scenes are still there. A round compound was made of wood and bamboo fence before the day of fight. On the assigned day the keepers enter the compound along with their buffalo's after gathering of kings and people at the field. The buffalo fight is a dangerous one. The fighter buffalo's roar against each other and once freed by the keepers they start fighting. The keeper cheers his buffalo with a stick in his hands and running alongside it. Buffalo s fight with their heads and horns. Sometimes the loser buffalo flees the field and the other buffalo runs after it and attacks fiercely. Sometimes amusingly the two buffalos do not fight and turn away from each other smelling one another. The Buffalo were fought with pairs. Two equal napped buffalo's fight is an attractive sight. Takuri Xingia and Phelenga Xingia – two types of horned buffalo s are there. It is believed that the buffalo with Takuri Xingia horn can fight more. Two horns of buffalo are known as – rang xinga, the right sided one, and khang xinga, the left sided one. Generally, the one who starts fighting with the left side is believed to won. If both the buffalos fight with their left horns the fight becomes more exciting. (Yeain Chetia, T. (2012), Asomiya Pratidin.) In the fight buffalos mostly get wounded and sometimes even die. In the Deodhai Axom Buranji it is written about buffalo fight as such – "two equal napped buffalo are freed into the compound. As soon as the two see each other the fight begins. The loser one hitting the fence run away from the compound. When the winner one tries to run after it the way is blocked with wood keeping it inside." (Bhuyan, S.K., (1932) Deodhai Axom Buranji). Besides organized by kings, among the common people also buffalo fights were organized. In this fights, the compound was not surrounded by fence rather than it was surrounded by people gathering at the site in an open field where the fight is held. If the buffalo's fight for longer duration, the keeper intervenes. If any buffalo meets its death at the game, the owner put a cloth in front of people on which they contribute. In the days of Ahom king, the owner of the wining buffalo was facilitated with prizes and awards.

There is a common belief associated with buffalo fight. According to beliefs, the fights should be organized wishing for growth of the crop field and on top of that it was believed that man won't get head spinning after watching buffalo fight. Now a days buffalo fight are rarely to be seen.

Kukura juj or Cock Fight:

Cock fight was also popular in the Ahom period. For the cock fights organised under the Ahom kings the cocks were supplied by those people from the Kukurasua community. It is mentioned in the Deodhai Ahom Buranji that "Suhpha Dihingia king had organised cock fights during the days of his son Suklangpha Tipam king Baishakh." (Bhuyan, S.K., (1932), Deodhai Ahom Buranji). In his book Ahomor Din Hiteswar Barbarua had written, "Kings and courtiers found amusement in cock fights; but from the time Ahoms followed Hindu religion the cock fighting's were

abandoned.” In the present time, some amongst the tribal and tea tribes cock fights can be seen. The cocks were fought with pairs. Some owners even tied knives at the feet of the cocks. The cocks became excited once they were freed and fought until one got killed.

Haati juj or Elephant Fight:

According to *Axom Buranjy* Kashinath Tamuli Phukan from Rudra Singha's times the tradition of elephant fight had been started. At the elephant stable in the north of Rang Ghar more than 200-300 elephants were kept for fighting. At the bank of Dikhow river with long bamboo and wood fencing were made to build the stables. The Hatibaruas took care of the elephants. These were fed with sticky rice and black pulses for almost 3 months every morning and evening to excite them to be ready for fight. Before the fight at the neck of the elephant a bell was hanged which was called *gajghanta*. It is mentioned in the history books that the fights were held in two forms – one is at the open field and the other is inside the compound on a high mound of soils. The fight at the open was known as *Melajuj*. In the fight inside compound the elephants backs were covered with rope made from jute and the mahout controlled the elephant holding the rope. The elephant that lost the fight run away. Sometimes elephants died along with the mahout. The *gajghanta* hanged at the neck of the elephant was meant to make people aware. About the fight held during Ahom period is mentioned in *Deodhai Ahom Buranji* as such, “when in the months of Fagun and Chot the elephants get mad, then to make them fight in a large elephant stable a mad elephant is entered along with the mahout.” (Bhuyan, S.K., (1932), *Deodhai Ahom Buranji*)

Besides elephant fight elephant racing competitions were also held. Elephants were regarded as symbol of glory. Moreover, elephants were used in fighting battles and also as vehicle for communication.

Bulbuli Soraai juj or Nightingale Fight:

In Pramatta Singha or Susenpha's days in the historically famous place Hajo of Kamrup district the Bulbuli birds fights started. According to unwritten history in 1750 Pramatta Singha after building the Madhav Mandir Douli in the yard of the temple had watched hawk fight. One day in the north of temple by seeing a pair of bulbuli fighting he desired to watch bulbuli fight rather than hawk fight. Since then, traditionally bulbuli fights were organized in the Madhav Mandir of Hajo.

In the ancient times, these fights were organized between Bhoralitula and Sonaritula team. But this is not restricted to particular team now a days. Bulbuli birds were trained to get along with people and during training these are fed with bhimkal (one type of banana), milk, jaggery etc to build up a fighting spirit. No food was provided in the day of event but an alcoholic 'bhog' was given. This made them more hungry and thus the fight became more interesting. The one who directed the fight was known as Maching.

Among the games of animals during the Ahom period fights between tiger-bear, boar-tiger, tiger-lion, tiger-crocodile and mithun etc were also played. For such fights at the centre of an open field a heap of mound fenced with tight net so that

the animals couldn't get out of it. Three structured fence was given and inside the fights were held. In the *Deodhai Axom Buranji* the beautiful descriptions of the king's amusement in such fights are given.

Maaljuj or Wrestling:

Among the other games wrestling was of major importance. At the yard of Rang Ghar this was held and from other states wrestlers came to participate. The fight between Kushan and Ahom wrestler found mention in history. Each year at the Rangpur Behar many people were gathered. As a memoir for wrestling at the days of Ahom kings, in later times, statues of wrestlers were built.

Naukhel or Boat Racing (soranau/small boat, pansoinau/medium boat, bornau/big boat) : Boat racing was popular among other games related to water. In ancient Assam, there were different types of boats in large numbers – fighting boats, trading boat used by traders, sports boats and normal boats etc. According to their usage the boats had varied names. The boats were decorated beautifully for the games. Hundreds of boats were lined up at the Brahmaputra and at the decided hour the racing started at the sound of bullet. The boatmen uttered auspicious words before starting race. (Neog, H. & Gogoi, L., “Asomiya Sanskriti”). The winners were gifted with awards. In Barpeta this sport is still practised.

Hoi Gudu Khel:

Another noteworthy game was hoi gudu which was played with different rules according to different names. Two teams required for this game. One team need to hit the player from the other team singing in one breath – “*hoigudu suwali bandoror puwali*”. Many even play uttering “*gudu*”. This game is especially popular among the teens. Somme even name it as *gorokhia lorar khel*. This game can be seen sometimes in present times but technological advancements have taken its place in present times.

Tanguti: This sport had been seen in rural scenario until recently. A tiny twig is sharpened in each side and hit upwards with another stick. The distance of that twig's reaching point is measured with the stick and thus the team gets score. And if the twig can be caught at the air there will be no scoring. This sport also becomes rare currently.

5. Conclusion

In the glorious 600 years reign of Ahom many games were popular and found significance in the Ahom society. Due to course of time, these games are limited only in the pages of history. However, some of these games were still played traditionally in some particular places of Assam. These traditional ancient games not only were confined to the enjoyment of people but also had the potentiality to develop human psychology.

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